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**Meyer, Hugo Richard.** *The British State Telegraphs.* Pp. xvii, 408. Price, \$1.50. New York: Macmillan Company, 1907.

The present volume is one of a series of five by the author, devoted to a discussion of municipal and national experiments in the field of industry. The book is divided into two distinct parts, Chapters II to VI outline the inception and history of the movement which culminated in the purchase of the telegraph lines by the British Government in 1870, and Chapters VI to XXIII give an account of their management with especial emphasis upon "the problem of a large body of civil servants in a Democracy."

The author frankly admits that he is actuated by a motive in presenting this work, viz.: to warn the American public against the present tendency to expand the functions of government. In order to substantiate this view a dark portrayal of the political and class influences exerted by the presence of a large body of public servants affords the main evidence.

It is shown that by the enfranchisement of the civil servants, in 1868, the basis of this political influence was laid, which was zealously employed in later years to advance wages and to secure other favors. The author insists that incapacity, mismanagement and political intrigue have characterized the service. Civil service unions have arisen for the purpose of concentrating and making effective this large vote which has been used for selfish ends and not for the promotion of public policies. A book with a plea so special suggests a biased view, and although many facts have been marshalled in support of the main contentions, still a doubt is raised as to whether all the truth has been presented. Too much emphasis may have been placed upon rates as a test of the success of the British venture. It is highly probable that if the evidence had been given its proper weight the dark picture here presented might prove less sombre.

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*Municipal and Private Operation of Public Utilities: Report of the National Civic Federation Commission on Public Ownership and Operation.*

Three volumes: Part I, Volume I, General Conclusions and Reports; Part II, Volume I, Reports of Experts—United States; Part II, Volume II, Reports of Experts—United Kingdom. Pp. xxxii, 2447. New York: National Civic Federation, 1907.

This large and valuable collection of reports on public utilities by various experts is a unique contribution to the literature on municipal government. Its purpose is declared to be "to determine impartially and scientifically the relative merits of private and public ownership and operation of public utilities." There has never before been so serious an attempt in the United States to collect systematically the material necessary for such a judgment. The success of the investigation presented is determined by the manner in which it was carried on. Every effort was made to keep a judicial attitude, and to avoid special pleading. Nevertheless, the evidence, or rather the

conclusions based upon the evidence, again and again show the desire upon the part of some of the contributors to prove a case. In numerous instances the authors, in commenting upon arguments advanced in the various articles by other contributors, point out that the interpretation given to various facts is erroneous, or that the facts selected for comparison are not typical of general conditions. This is especially true of the first volume, in which an attempt is made to summarize the detailed studies presented in the last two. The impression left upon the mind of the reader is often that produced by the arguments of counsel, rather than that by the opinion of the judge. The compilation is therefore chiefly valuable—and in this way it renders the student an inestimable service—as a storehouse of *facts*, but the duty of a critical analysis of the facts and their relative significance must still be borne by the student who uses the work as a reference.

This criticism applies, as noted above, especially to the first volume—the one interpreting the material collected. The collections of data presented in the final volumes are impartial, and so far as they could be made complete, entirely satisfactory. The branches of each subject chosen for investigation were carefully sketched beforehand, and there is, therefore, a commendable uniformity in the information on the various utilities examined. Specific questions were prepared in advance to cover every fact which seemed important. The experts in these preliminary investigations were to report the facts in accordance with these prescribed schedules, and were not expected even to tabulate the results, leaving this work entirely to the members of the commission or to duly appointed committees. Except where answers to the various inquiries were for various reasons unavailable, comparisons can therefore be made by the student with ease and with comparative assurance that the inferences drawn are not to be overthrown by neglected factors.

The commission was fortunate in the decision to limit the investigation to the more important public utilities, thus avoiding confusing detail and too summary treatment. The reports cover gas, electric lighting and power, street railways and water, whether the plants are privately or publicly owned. The third volume is devoted to a presentation of the conditions surrounding the operation of public utilities in England, which was selected from among foreign countries because it was felt that on account of the similarity of institutions a comparison of results achieved there with those in the United States would be most instructive.

These three volumes as a whole present the most valuable compilation of statistics concerning municipal affairs yet published in the United States. Whatever limitations are present are in large degree unavoidable, for the complexity of the subjects to be treated makes it unusually difficult, if not impossible, to draw from the facts a conclusion that will be convincing to all. An excellent index, covering, in the three volumes, forty-eight closely-printed pages, places the material within immediate reach.

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